

# The Middle East: *Problems and Promises*

By Fr. Dave Heney, July 2015

## What is the Problem?

Muslims remember a remarkable time years ago in the 8th century when Islamic armies conquered all of the Middle East, the North African continent, all of Spain and Portugal, and were even approaching Paris, France. This was the enormous Islamic *Caliphate*, or Islamic *kingdom* that dominated a vast region of the world. That Caliphate eventually collapsed, and France and Spain pushed Islamic armies back and the Middle East and North Africa were subdivided and colonized by various European powers into separate States along borders arranged by those western rulers. Most states eventually became independent in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but the loss of the Caliphate was seen as a humiliating loss of power and honor to this day.

Muslims recognize that the Middle East is now an economic and political disaster. Millions live in horrible poverty, with many living on just \$2 a day. Many politicians are corrupt and use power only to grow richer for themselves and their family. Devout Muslims wonder why is it that those who follow Allah, the One True God, live under such miserable economic and political conditions while secular western nations that are so dominated by sex, drugs, and immorality rule the world. How could Islam fall so low? *They wonder ...what went wrong!*

In the mid-twentieth century, Muslim scholars, like Sayyid Qutb and several others, believed that Islamic decline happened because *Muslims were not following original Islamic beliefs closely enough*. Muslims must return to a pure practice of the faith as it was at the time of Mohammed and especially avoid western cultural influence. They developed an extremely radical and violent fundamentalist style that they believed would restore Islam to its former glory. The Wahhabi sect in Saudi Arabia and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are early examples of this new movement which would explode into even more radical styles in recent years. *Radical Islamic Fundamentalists want the Caliphate back!*

## Religious sources and rivalries within Islam

The ***Quran*** is a sacred book which Muslims believe was dictated verbatim by God to Mohammed over many years which he wrote down exactly as heard. It is considered the verbatim words of God and so has extraordinary authority.

The ***Hadiths*** is a later book listing many of the sayings and deeds of Mohammed, himself. For several generations after Mohammed, many of his followers collected remembered sayings and deeds into this book. *It is in the Hadiths where most of the strictest Islamic rules and traditions are found.*

Mohammed did not designate a successor which led to serious controversy about who should lead this new religion in the future and how the two books should be understood. Eventually two rival factions emerged claiming that right to lead all Islamic faithful.

**SHIA Muslims** held that leadership should arise from *actual family descendants of Mohamed*. They are mostly in Iran, southern Iraq, and Syria, or about 20% of worldwide Islam.

**SUNNI Muslims** held that the faithful *should guide themselves* according to the Quran and Hadiths. Sunni's dominate in all other Islamic states, or about 80% of all Islamic people.

**SHIA & SUNNI rivalry;** *after centuries of relative peace between these two factions, each group recently developed strands of radical and extreme Shia and Sunni fundamentalism that each seeks the final destruction of the other. This is not a mere political disagreement, but a final battle with extremists on each side seeking total victory. Most Middle East states have mainly either Shia or Sunni populations, therefore Shia states like Iran and Syria now oppose Sunni states like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan. This bitter and violent Shia vs. Sunni rivalry underlies much of what is happening between Middle East states today.*

## Cultural sources of Islam

Islam began in an **ancient Arab tribal culture** which has several deeply ingrained features, among those are Tribal Loyalty, Honor vs. Shame, a Warrior Culture, a love for Trading, Hospitality and keeping the Status Quo.

**Tribal Loyalties** Traditional Arab people see themselves first as family, clan, and tribe members and secondarily as state citizens. They value and reward loyalty to their family, clan, and tribe first, unlike western societies that value and reward personal skills and performance. Therefore Arab economic and political policies often feature favoritism towards tribal members over others. What we might call corruption is considered tribal loyalty and respect.

**Honor & Shame** Honor is the public perception of one's reputation. It was the highest ancient Arab cultural value and desired even more than wealth. Honor comes from the public *perception* of strength, cleverness, domination, and power. Shame is the public *perception* of weakness, looking foolish, or losing in battle. In any conflict, there is only one winner and loser and never a "win-win" result. Every effort was made to accrue honor and avoid shame. Even a question posed during normal a conversation was a form of "battle" that the Gospels portray happening often between Pharisees and Jesus.

**Warrior Culture** Ancient Arab tribal economies were often based on raiding neighboring caravans and nearby villages in sudden and swift attacks rather than business enterprise.

Careful strategy was not needed in these brash and even reckless assaults. Success (and honor) often came from bold, fearless, and fairly short conflicts.

***Trading*** The Middle East area was centrally located in the ancient world. For centuries caravans connected East and West with long threads of trade that exchanged spices and horses from the east with western classics from the west. Since every negotiation was a form of “battle” people valued bargaining and negotiation skills. Getting a “good deal” greatly increased one’s honor.

***Hospitality*** A harsh desert area where life giving resources were scarce developed a wonderful custom of hospitality, protection, and provisions for nomadic guests who might perish if not welcomed into a nearby desert encampment. Guest were welcomed and protected no matter what their status.

***Status Quo*** The Middle East is still strongly guided by these features. Tribalism tends to be conservative and likes to maintain the status quo. *Innovation and entrepreneurship*, the hallmark of European economic and political success, were not encouraged in the Middle East. Therefore, many Middle Eastern states have not developed strong democratic institutions or enjoyed prosperity from the new global economy such as China and India have enjoyed.

*Middle Eastern actions are a combination of these cultural features that arise from the Quran, the Hadiths, and a pervasive and enduring ancient Arab tribal culture. Sometimes what we see in the Middle East has more to do with these Arab cultural features than anything else. Knowing how to distinguish them helps to understand the Middle East today.*

## **Modern Radical Islamic Fundamentalism**

Today, massive poverty and income inequality between the West and Middle Eastern Islamic countries has led to the rise of even more *Radical Islamic Fundamentalism* that demands the strictest version of Islam as the best way to restore the ancient Islamic Caliphate.

*They have also added the tactics of terrorism, violent persecution, and military might against any who stand in their way of achieving the goal of establishing the ancient Islamic Caliphate.*

Any one person or state that is not radical fundamentalist is considered an enemy and must be eradicated. Secular western nations and the US are the “far enemy” while westernized Muslim nations who have adopted western ways and behaviors are the “near enemy.” Radical Islamists are actually not anti-Semitic, but are ferociously anti-Israel because it is a non-Muslim state in the land of Mohammed, and so must be completely eradicated.

***Sharia Law*** is the application of the strictest understanding of Islam to a community’s formal moral and legal systems. Some of Sharia Law comes from the *Quran*, but most comes from the *Hadiths*, which are not the direct words of Allah but the remembered and collected words and

deeds of Mohammed. They are often very vague and ambiguous sayings that can be interpreted many ways. Radical Islamists use the strictest and harshest understanding, especially for even the smallest of infractions.

Disobeying Sharia law in Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran can result in scourging, dismemberment, and even stoning to death. In the most extreme forms, the penalty may be even harsher e.g. burned alive, buried alive, beheading, or dropped from tall buildings.

There are many radical groups that compete with each other in increasingly violent ways for Radical Islamic leadership against the West and within Muslim nations to restore the Islamic Caliphate. ***Here are brief summaries of a few of them.***

***Iran.*** In 1979, a radical fundamentalist Shia group led by Ayatollah Khomeini was the first radical Islamic group to actually take over a modern state; the government of Iran. It was the first time radicals had the massive resources of a wealthy state to fund terrorism around the world. It especially considers the USA as the “The Great Satan” and its main enemy with whom it can never make peace. Many of the roadside bombs that killed or maimed US forces in Iraq were designed and made in Iran. It supports *Hezbollah*, a Shia terrorist group in Lebanon, the Shia Syrian government, and the Shia Iraqi government. Iran is also developing nuclear weapon capability which has united Israel with all other Sunni Middle East states that consider it and Iran’s other terrorist sponsoring behavior a mortal threat.

***Al Qaeda*** is a Sunni group that tries to restore the Caliphate by first attacking the “far enemy” or decadent western culture as embodied by the USA. Al Qaeda uses the terror tactic of the unexpected bomb in a crowded area to frighten non-Muslims into submission. It is mainly funded by wealthy Sunni Arab donors. It was no accident that Al Qaeda attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9-11 as a way of destroying both the USA global business enterprise and its military capability. After its initial defeat in Afghanistan it moved to Iraq. After its defeat there by US and coalition forces in 2009, it moved to Syria and eventually became ISIS (The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria).

***ISIS*** is a Sunni group that tries to restore the Caliphate by actually capturing land, cities, and national resources from the “near enemy” like Muslims governments in Syria and Iraq. They are funded by the sale of captured oil resources, looting of banks, extortion, and kidnappings. As a sign of ancient religious credibility, they adopt many historical names, behaviors, and even military tactics from the time of Mohammed, such as beheadings, strict Sharia law, and swift and unexpected terror raids and attacks. Dying in this cause also guarantees physical pleasures in heaven. ISIS considers all Muslims who do not follow the most fundamentalist understanding as heretics for which the consequence is the cruelest public executions. ISIS

broadcasts atrocities on the internet to frighten neighboring villages and convey a warrior image of unstoppable power.

ISIS is now adopting Al Qaeda terrorism methods and encouraging Muslim people around the world to initiate their own “lone wolf” attacks on vulnerable but high value western targets that will ensure extensive worldwide television coverage.

The ISIS goal is to inaugurate a “final apocalyptic” battle between the west, (the USA) and the forces of radical Islam, at the end of which, Islamic prophets of old will intervene for final Islamic victory.

Their initial stunning success has contributed to their “winning warrior” image. The absence of a strong western response contributes to that sense of invulnerability and inevitable success. Young Arab are attracted by the prospect of excitement, adventure, success in battle, money, fulfilling a noble religious Islamic cause, and the prospect of eternal pleasures in heaven!

***Hamas*** is a Sunni group mainly located in the Gaza Strip and confines its activities to terror attacks against Israel. It has received billions of dollars over the years, especially from Iran and Turkey. Much of that went into military supplies and the digging of tunnels into Israel for the purpose of infiltration. They occasionally launch poorly aimed short range missiles into nearby Israeli farmland. They also use innocent citizens as human shields by placing military supplies and armaments in schools, hospitals, and marketplaces. In the last Hamas war against Israel in 2014, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan broke with Hamas and sided with Israel. Hamas has not received much funding for rebuilding since then.

***Hezbollah*** is a Shia group located in southern Lebanon along the northern Israeli border, which they practically run as a private mini-state. They are funded almost entirely by Iran. Their last major offensive against Israel was in 2006, which led to a draw. Recently, they have mainly been preoccupied trying to defend the Shia Syrian government from ISIS and other armed factions and so have focused all their efforts there rather than anti-Israeli action.

***Taliban*** are a Sunni group located mainly in Afghanistan and just inside Pakistan. They originally harbored Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda training camps according to the Arab virtue of hospitality and would not turn him over to the US after the 9-11 attack. Although out of power now, they still have an uneasy relationship with the new democratically elected Afghan government. They also keep their activities centered in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and receive much funding from the Heroin crop grown in Afghanistan.

***Religious Persecution*** Many of these radical Islamic groups are violently intolerant of any other faith, especially Jews and Christians. The Christian community is widely scattered throughout the Middle East, with large minority populations mainly in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon,

Egypt, and Israel. Christians are under tremendous pressure. Terrorism and persecution especially in Iraq and Syria has caused most to emigrate in great fear for their lives. Radical Islamic persecution has involved horrific tortures, including beheadings and even crucifixions. It would be a profound tragedy if Christianity were to disappear from the Holy Land.

(See my article: “**Why do Islamic Fundamentalists hate America**” at [daveheney.com](http://daveheney.com))

***Convert to Islam or die*** *No amount of western diplomacy, polite discourse, foreign aid, good behavior, appeasement, or respectful negotiations by western nations or even lukewarm Muslims can change that permanent enemy status that Western nations, Christianity, and Jews have by simply being non-radical Muslims. Only devout radical Islamic fundamentalists are accepted. Everyone else must either convert or be eliminated!*

## **Modern & Ancient Radical Islamic Customs**

Many of these militant groups want to restore the Caliphate precisely as it was at the time of Mohammed. They use ancient religious terminology and religious practices of that time, such as beheadings, sharia law, and strict moral codes to establish credibility with that time period.

They also take advantage of the modern “battleground” of your television set in your home. A graphic and violent news video coming into your home of an exploding bomb in a crowded marketplace filled with women and children horribly massacred or the capture of an Iraqi city with the tortuous death of thousands of innocent civilians can instill fear around the world.

ISIS is especially skillful with social media to both publicize their extraordinarily violent and cruel executions and to recruit new members from around the world.

*All these groups are in a desperate and increasingly violent competition with each other using both ancient and modern means to be the dominant radical fundamentalist Islamic force in the world today. Images of dominance and power are the “currency” of this extremist culture. How does it attract recruits from around the world?*

## **Determining the “Strongest Horse”**

In Middle Eastern Arab culture, which has a long history of horse breeding and trading, as well as a warrior tradition, there is a well-known saying that guides much of Arab life. When choosing horses... *always go with the strongest horse*. They ask today, “Is the USA or ISIS or Al Qaeda or Iran the strongest horse?”

If Al Qaeda or ISIS or Iran *appears* stronger, then Islamic youth looking for excitement, spiritual purpose, and adventure, *and to be on the winning side of strong warriors* will join the fight. If the US coalition appears stronger, then Arab youth will not join. Since Al Qaeda is mainly a

terrorist organization of isolated cells around the world, it is harder to defeat. Its aura of success depends on successful attacks by small bands of terrorists, such as the “Charlie Hebdo” events in Paris, or Fort Hood massacre in Texas.

However, ISIS is a land army, with no air force or navy. It’s aura of success depends entirely on capturing and maintaining of land and isolated towns and villages. These are easy to capture but hard to hold and maintain. In addition, ISIS has yet to fight a modern well trained combined air and land military force. If ISIS begins to lose land to Iraqi and Coalition forces, or if local people rise up and rebel from their harsh rule, it will immediately lose its “aura” of being the “stronger horse.” Everyone will see it as the losers they actually are.

***The USA as the Stronger Horse:*** After 9-11, the US carefully analyzed the immediate and global causes of this horrible attack and decided that our real enemy was not the individual 19 hijackers but the rise of radical Islamic fundamentalism across the Middle East. This parallels the decision of the USA in December 1941 when it did not just target the 300 Japanese pilots who bombed Pearl Harbor but rather the entire Japanese Imperial Military System that ordered that sneak military attack. In World War II, the goal was comprehensive; to dismantle the Japanese military government and the Nazi Germany military government. The size of these threats determined the size of the US response which was truly a world-wide effort. It was not a “police action” to arrest Japanese or German leaders but an effort to change entire cultures.

The US and its allies determined that Radical Islamic Fundamentalism was gaining the resources of wealthy oil rich States, like Iran, Iraq and Libya, but also in heroin rich Afghanistan. All these states were dictatorships with no accountability to their citizens, leading radical leaders like Saddam Hussein, the Iranian Ayatollahs, and Libya’s Muammar Khadafy to use state resources for terror against the west. In addition, they all were a threat to Israel, the only true democracy in the Middle East and our longtime ally.

*Therefore, the US embarked on a comprehensive multi-nation program to change the entire region of the Middle East from an area prone to radical Islamic fundamentalism arising from a sense of historical decline, to a region that would enjoy political and economic prosperity, especially for the immense populations of poor and disenfranchised people. They entered as the stronger horse.*

## **Afghan and Iraq Invasions**

The invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq were an attempt to change the culture of violent religious extremism to an indigenous and home grown *Middle Eastern style democracy* to allow for fairer power sharing between Shia and Sunnis, and a *free-market capitalism* to help the Middle East states join the global economy and finally enjoy the prosperity that families around the world enjoy. The underlying purpose of both efforts was *regime change* as both

governments supported radical Islamic fundamentalism. That was considered the main mortal threat to the people of the United States, and so both efforts received congressional approval.

In 2002, after initial and swift military success in Afghanistan, led by Afghan tribes with American Special Forces support and airstrikes, free elections were held that brought forth a new government along nascent democratic and capitalist ideals. Al-Qaeda forces left the area and moved to Iraq.

The underlying basis for the Iraq invasion was regime change of Saddam Hussein who was supporting Islamic extremism and not principally about weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The basis of the WMD rationale was to build a coalition in the United Nations which does not recognize regime change as a cause for UN action. Iraq had previously invaded Iran, invaded Kuwait, used WMD several times before on its own citizens, and was becoming increasingly bellicose again toward the west. After many years of active western intelligence activity, all western intelligence agencies were in agreement that there was sufficient and reasonable cause to believe that Iraq had WMD capability, inventory, and motivation, leading to a solid UN resolution authorizing the use force against Iraq.

In 2003, after the swift initial success of the US invasion of Iraq and overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime, Muammar Khadafy, perhaps thinking he was next, and respecting the “Strong Horse” tactics of the USA led coalition, surrendered his entire stockpile of WMD. Prospects for Middle East peace looked good at that moment.

However, Sunni Al Qaeda forces successfully continued a violent insurgency in Iraq, mainly against Shia civilians and Shia religious shrines, again to conquer Shia Islam. The situation seriously deteriorated into chaos for several years. Many of the recently disbanded Iraqi army joined the insurgency. Hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians died in Shia-Sunni violence along with over 4,000 Americans. People around the world were horrified at the carnage and struggled to understand. Consequently, the entire war effort became part of a bitter presidential campaign in 2004, leading to confusion and uncertainty among both Americans and our Arab allies about American goals. Our Arab allies in the Middle East did not know who to trust or with whom to align themselves.

Nevertheless, in 2006, US Army General Petraeus determined that the key to success was to enlist Arab Sunni tribal leaders, the real source of authority in Arab culture, to the anti Al-Qaeda cause.

The USA sent a “surge” of thousands of American troops to partner with Islamic Arab Sunni tribal chieftains against Al-Qaeda in Iraq. As a consequence of this massive military show of strength, many Iraqi tribal chieftains in the large Anbar region of Iraq recognized the US as the



“Stronger Horse” and switched sides from Al Qaeda to the US, and ordered their tribes to follow. After this “Anbar Awakening” Al Qaeda quickly left for Syria.

A similar “surge” of US forces occurred in 2009 in Afghanistan with similar successful results.

From 2009 to 2013, the US frequently affirmed that Iraq and Afghanistan were finally “peaceful and prosperous.” Internationally recognized fair elections in Iraq installed a relatively inclusive government with both Sunni and Shia factions. The Middle East was finally on the verge of success.

*If Arab governments could secure the safety of their citizens with strong and confident measures and develop a more just economic and political system that brings prosperity, justice, and religious freedom to the region, the need for a Islamic Caliphate would fade for both ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and Iran. The Arab Spring in 2010 revealed that this change is exactly what the vast majority of young Arab people across the Middle East desperately wanted.*

## **The Arab Spring of 2010-11**

In 2009, Iranian youth erupted in widespread demonstrations across the country against the radical Islamic government over obvious and massive fraud in the elections that year. They appealed for US help, which was refused. The demonstrations were eventually crushed.

In late 2010, Arab youth erupted again in powerful demonstrations; this time *throughout* the Middle East called the **Arab Spring**. *Why did this happen?*

The Middle East today remains largely poor and underdeveloped. About 50% of the Middle East is under the age of 30 ...*and 50% of them are unemployed!* In that culture, a young Arab man cannot get married unless he has a job, and there are not enough jobs. Despite high economic growth, Arab people know that much of their country’s wealth goes to a small upper class, or elder tribal members, or the leader himself. Millions of Arab youth simply want to get married and start a family and deeply resent their poor status especially when they know so much economic wealth goes to corrupt government and military officials.

Muslims and Christians in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt joined together in late 2010 and early 2011 to overthrow corrupt governments and demand a more just free market system so that everyone could participate in the rising global economy. *Amazingly, there were no anti-Israel or anti-American chants or even pro-Islam chants from the millions of Islamic youth who demonstrated across the Middle East at that time.* The Arab Spring was a heartfelt expression of both Christian and Islamic Arab youth across the Middle East for economic viability and political stability ...for the noble purpose of simply having a family!

The revolutions were successful in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. However, when the newly democratically elected leader of Egypt, Mohammed Morsi, made the economy even worse,

promoted Islamic fundamentalism, and even attacked Christians, the whole country rose up in opposition and he was peacefully but swiftly removed a year later. The present leader, Abdel Sisi, a devout Muslim, has united Muslims and Christians together again and has begun significant economic recovery. He even attended Christmas midnight mass as a sign of solidarity with Christians!

*The Arab Spring revealed that the vast majority of Arabs, and especially Arab youth, do not support Islamic Fundamentalism and seek only a better life for themselves and their family.*

## **The Syrian-USA “Red Line” and Rise of ISIS**

Syria is an Arab country with significant Shia, Sunni, and Christian populations that have recently lived in relative peace. The latest Shia leader, Bashar Assad has dictatorial powers but has attempted to support all groups. Nevertheless, Sunni Syrians rose up in the spirit of the Arab Spring seeking even more political, economic, and religious freedom.

The Arab Spring in 2011 in Syria was brutally crushed by Assad but the protestors then continued as a military fight between government forces and various armed Sunni factions. Each side used increasingly violent tactics, including poison gas by the government in 2013 against Sunni rebels. The US had earlier declared that the use of poison gas was a “red line” that Syria must not cross or face retaliation. The USA backed off that threat which has had enormous and long lasting consequences in many areas. It was a “negotiating battle” that the USA was seen to have lost to Shia Syria, Iraq, and Iran.

Sunni Muslims believed the USA let Assad off the hook to appease Shia Iran with whom negotiations had begun on the Shia Iranian nuclear program. Sunni Muslims perceived American weakness and its tilt toward Iran as a clear signal to Assad and the various armed Sunni factions that promises from the US were not reliable, and that the US *would never intervene with force*. This tilt toward Shia Iran also strengthened the Shia Iraqi government that continued its suppression of Sunni tribes.

Groups like ISIS recognized immediately that they were safe from attack. ISIS swiftly filled in the gap left by the absence of US forces, the weakness of the Iraqi Army officer corps, and the chaos in Syria. ISIS also capitalized on Sunni resentment of the Shia Iraqi leaders anti-Sunni policies. Their new charismatic leader embarked on a successful program of land and town acquisitions.

Military success often comes from effective and inspiring leaders who can accomplish the missions and provide for their troops. ISIS also had a charismatic and forceful leader along with highly professional former Saddam Hussein military officers who could effectively lead and

supply their troops. Their rapid success led to a well-deserved reputation as the “winning warrior” and “stronger horse” as compared to the US, Syria, and Iraqi forces.

## **Why did the Iraqi Army fail to stop ISIS?**

Iraq has both Sunni and Shia populations. However, the rapid withdrawal of US forces and loss of influence led to the collapse of this inclusive Shia-Sunni government that had just become solvent and successful in 2009. In the absence of US direction, the new Shia Prime Minister removed both Sunni politicians and many of the US Army trained highly professional Iraqi officers from the military and installed incompetent political appointees, and even his own corrupt relatives.

The Iraq Army collapsed in the face of ISIS not because of cowardice or a lack of will but because their recently installed officers were grossly incompetent. Military success is almost entirely based on effective leadership which was entirely missing. The officers that were highly trained by the US Army were replaced with incompetent political appointees. They failed to supply their troops with food, water, and especially ammunition. No army anywhere can fight without food, water, ammo, and competent leaders.

Recently, American and coalition forces fighting ISIS are now rapidly trying to replicate what had worked so well in Iraq in 2008 and 2009, namely, the recruitment of Sunni tribal leaders and Kurdish forces that are trained again by US forces who will produce troops for the fight. However, the continuing fallout from the Syrian-Red Line debacle has eroded the credibility of the US with the tribal leaders with whom we would like recruit.

## **The Shia Iranian Nuclear Program**

Iran began a program years ago to build a nuclear weapon which became a source of “honor” for the Shia Iranian people. *This is a serious escalation of the traditional Shia-Sunni rivalry!*

The problem is that neighboring Sunni regimes, like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, will want one too. *Sunni states will not tolerate a Shia state getting a nuclear weapon without their getting one as well, and they can simply buy them from North Korea, Russia, Pakistan, or China.* This will lead to an uncontrolled Middle East nuclear arms race. None of these regimes have a good track record of arms security, so who knows where these nuclear arms might end up! It is easy to see how various terrorist groups could have easy access to them.

In addition, Iran has continuously expressed the goal of eradicating Israel and its 8 million people. Israel clearly considers Iran an enemy, and has considered a preemptive strike against its nuclear facilities.

To counter this threat against Israel and the whole of the Middle East, the US along with strong resolutions from the United Nations displayed “Strong Horse” diplomacy with severe economic sanctions against the Iranian regime. It worked! *The Iranian government asked for negotiations to alleviate their severe economic plight.*

Iran entered into complex negotiations with the US over its nuclear program, but still continued its bomb making capabilities and support for worldwide terrorism.

The recently signed agreement is not a formal treaty but rather a lower level Presidential Agreement. Congress passed a law recently that requires a 60 day period of Congressional review and approval for it to take effect. If denied, the President can veto that denial, unless the Congress has the votes to override the veto. This Congressional showdown will occur in the early fall of 2015.

**Reasons For the Agreement:** US negotiators *want to cooperate with Iran* and believe this treaty is the best way to slow down Iranian nuclear capability. They believe compromise and cooperation between opposing nations is possible, and recalls the good effects that came in the 1970’s from Nixon’s trip to China and the “Detente” policy of economic and commercial engagement with the Soviet Union.

They also believe that ending sanctions and legitimizing the Iranian Government will moderate its involvement in terrorism, and help Iran fight ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Both Russia and China are the strongest proponents in that they are eager to sell large military systems and weapons to Iran.

Proponents also believe they can catch any Iranian cheating with relatively fast inspections that can happen “anywhere and anytime.” However, they also acknowledge that inspections of any specific nuclear site can take over 20 days to actually commence if Iran objects.

Finally, the US believes it is in our interests to reintegrate a large powerful Middle Eastern country into world affairs rather than have it outside and unapproachable. The eagerness of many other nations to re-engage with Iran in trade helps support that argument.

**Reasons against the Agreement:** Opponents want to *end the radical Islamic Iranian regime, not cooperate with leaders they cannot trust and believe cannot change, and that there is no comparison with examples of China and the Soviet Union during Cold War.*

In the 1970’s and 1980’s, both Chinese and Soviet Union leaders were guided by faded communist theories that most no longer really believed. But Iran has devout religious leaders with deeply held extreme religious beliefs that cannot change and that completely guide government policy. These leaders believe Sharia law comes directly from God so no

compromise is ever possible, especially with the “Great Satan USA” and so Iran will continue its war against the USA and Israel.

Opponents also recall that in the 1980’s the US wanted to *end Communism once and for all* and led a robust arms race that bankrupted and deeply weakened the Soviet Union, which inspired Poland and other Eastern European states to revolt, leading to the final communist collapse in 1989. Similarly, they believe most Iranians do not accept the radical Islam of their leaders and actually want the same type of direct US confrontation to end the Iranian government that the US used to collapse the Soviet Union.

Finally, opponents believe that in the absence of “anywhere-anytime” inspections, Iran will certainly cheat on the Agreement provisions and continue to build a nuclear capability.

**What about sanctions relief? Iran will receive around 130 billion dollars as its foreign assets are released. All Middle Eastern countries believe Iran will not use that cash to help Iranian people, but will use it to fund its military support for Iranian militias in Iraq, Syria, as well as Hezbollah, and Hamas, and its constant war against Israel and the USA. In this period of easing of sanctions Russia and China are eager to sell new weapons systems to Iran.**

Every Sunni Middle Eastern nation opposes this treaty, except, of course, Shia Iraq and Syria, which are client states of Iran. They rest believe that Iran will use the newly released funds for terrorism, and will easily cheat on the agreement, prevent inspections, and continue to build a nuclear bomb.

*Iran desperately sought negotiations because of powerful and successful Western sanctions. They were economically weak and close to collapse when they sought out negotiations. However, Iranians soon discovered that the US desperately wanted a nuclear deal more and so Iran successfully held out for better terms. They are now perceived as having outfoxed the USA in the highly prized Middle Eastern art of negotiations.*

## **What is the promise? ...free markets, free people, and freedom of religion**

The Middle East continues to be rocked by competing Shia and Sunni extremist Islamic factions, the desperate plight of millions of poor people including millions of war refugees, and the violent regime of terror against the west. People throughout the region struggle to find answers to several important questions:

- ***Why is the Middle East so poor?***
- ***What is the true understanding of Islam?***
- ***What is the proper place of Islam among other faiths in the world today?***
- ***Can Islamic countries join the world economy and keep their faith and culture intact?***

Whenever Islamic answers have included global violence and terrorism, the west gets involved to fight back, as it should. That role has evolved over the years but it can never end as long as the threat is there. How we see the size of the threat determines our response. Most have seen the threat to be large and existential, leading to a corresponding large and comprehensive political, economic, and military response. Those who see the threat is small favor more smaller police-like actions of arrest and trial of individual terrorists.

The global economic system is moving ahead with or without the Middle East. To the extent Arab and Islamic states can participate in a way that keeps basic values, avoids the worst of western cultural influence, promotes the rule of law, ensures real democracy, *freedom of religion*, and economic prosperity for Middle Eastern families; then peace may be possible. *The final answers must come from leaders within the Arab world and Islam.* The west will certainly help as friendly global “neighbors” but the path to responsible world citizenship lies with them.

## **What is the problem between Israel & Palestine?**

Before WWI, the entire Middle East was part of the Ottoman Empire, centered in Turkey. The Turks largely neglected political and economic development of the Middle East and simply exploited it for its mineral resources. The region became even poorer.

During WWI, the Turks allied with Germany. The British and French promised statehood and prosperity to the Arab tribes if they would rise up against the Turks. This successful effort was led in part by British officer T.E. Lawrence, the famous “Lawrence of Arabia.” However, France and Britain later cynically divided the land for themselves instead. France took what is now Lebanon and Syria, while Britain took what is now Iraq, Jordan, and Israel. The latter two areas were one area called Palestine. In 1921, the area east of the Jordan River became the country of Transjordan. The area on the west remained Palestine, an area filled with both Jews and Arabs.

For many years Jewish and Arab settlers continued to move into the Palestine. However, in anticipation of statehood one day, the Jewish settlers slowly developed the infrastructure of a state, with factories, industries, farms, roads, schools, and even resurrected ancient Hebrew as a modern language.

In 1947, the United Nations divided what is now Israel into semi-equal Jewish and Arab population areas. The goal was to make neither side dominant which would hopefully lead to cooperation between Jews and Arabs within the new State of Israel. However, neighboring

Arab countries immediately attacked the new Israeli State. Israel was militarily successful and annexed even more areas for better defense in the future. Palestinians in those areas either migrated within the country or emigrated, losing their homes and property.

In 1967, seeing signs of an massive and imminent Arab invasion from Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike which was successful and led to Israel's control of the entire West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Sinai Peninsula, although none were ever formally annexed as part of Israel. In 1973, Egypt and Syria suddenly attacked Israel again but were decisively beaten. As a result, Egypt and Jordan signed formal peace treaties with Israel that remain effective today. Israel returned Sinai to Egypt in 1974. It still retains the West Bank and Gaza.

*The legacy of the wars against Israel has revealed to the neighboring Arab states that they cannot confront Israel with a military invasion.*

### **Key Issue: Israeli Security vs. Palestinian Sovereignty**

Palestinians have felt since 1947 that they have lost land, especially in the West Bank and Gaza that they want back. Israelis have felt that they are surrounded by mortal enemies from several Arab invasions that sought its total destruction and so Israelis want reliable and trustworthy safety and security. The actions of both sides have been to achieve these deeply felt aims; *reliable safety for Israel and recognized sovereignty for Palestinians*. Sometimes those actions have been through peaceful negotiations and sometimes it has been through violence and war.

### **Three Possible Solutions**

- **ONE STATE OF PALESTINE:** Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran want the entire region to be one state of Palestine, with no Israel at all. The State of Israel would be destroyed.
- **ONE STATE OF ISRAEL:** Conservative Israelis want the entire West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Israel to be one Israeli state with no Palestinian entity at all.
- **TWO STATES OF ISRAEL & PALESTINE:** The official US, United Nations, European Union, and Russian position is to have a Two-State solution with a safe and secure Israel from attack and a prosperous and sovereign Palestinian State.

### **Israeli Settlements**

After the 1967 Six-Day War, as a way to bolster its defensive position from annihilation from invasion or terror attacks from the West Bank, Israel began to allow Israeli citizens to build new fortified settlements there. It was in effect, extending its national border further away from Israel proper. Palestinians feel that Israel is confiscating land that belongs to them. New settlement building has now largely ceased, with the exception of extending existing

settlements with new adjacent neighborhoods to accommodate population increases of those settlers. Most settlements are near the Israeli border, with the highest group near Jerusalem itself.

## **The Palestinian Authority**

In the 1994, Israel ceded some control of the West Bank and Gaza to the new Palestinian Authority (PA), which is the political entity that was developed by successful Palestinian and Israeli negotiations and that runs Palestinian affairs to this day. To further this peace process, in 2006, Israel completely pulled out of the Gaza Strip.

There are two main political parties in the PA; **Fatah**, which is mainly in the West Bank, and **Hamas**, which is mainly in the Gaza Strip. *Hamas* has consistently attacked Israel over the years from its bases in Gaza with rocket attacks and terrorist infiltration. The US considers *Hamas* to be a terrorist organization and will not negotiate with them. *Fatah* is more moderate and has joined with Israel and the US on many issues of governance, security forces training, and economic progress toward a two-state solution. Nevertheless, *Hamas* still wants a one state solution with the complete destruction of Israel.

## **The Intifada (*uprising*) and Israeli Security Fence**

In the year 2000, the USA came very close to brokering an agreement, but which failed. The Palestinians then launched several months of violent terrorist attacks and bombings against Israeli people in cafes, restaurants, and busses in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Over 1,000 Israeli citizens perished, which compared to the population of the United States is equivalent to over 50,000 Americans. No country anywhere can tolerate such atrocities from another country.

As a direct consequence of the intifada, and to prevent infiltration of terrorists from the Palestinian territories, Israel built a long Security Fence completely around the West Bank and its border with Gaza. About 90% of the Security Fence is an electrified chain-link fence with camera monitors. In more highly sensitive urban areas it is a high concrete wall.

*The Security Fence has made Israelis feel much safer and has contributed to a faster progress on a peace plan. The Security Fence has been virtually 100% effective, stopping all terrorist infiltration from the West Bank and Gaza.*

## **Present Plan for Peace: Pre-1967 Borders with Land Swaps**



The almost universally accepted peace plan in the United Nations, USA, Europe, most Middle Eastern diplomats, and even among Palestinians and Israelis is that Israel will return to its pre-1967 borders and give up all control of the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, some areas of the West Bank that have large Israeli settlements will go to Israel and some areas of Israel will go to the Palestinians. There are the famous “Land-Swaps” that are part of the plan. The Palestinians will accept the right of Israel to exist and stop all attacks, and the Israelis will respect the sovereignty of the new Palestinian State.

What is delaying this plan is the presence of the terrorist group Hamas in the Palestinian Authority. The majority of Israeli politicians will not negotiate with a group that seeks their destruction, nor will Hamas negotiate with Israelis. Hamas wants Israel destroyed and is not interested in any peace plan at all. The Iranian nuclear program has also helped create a climate of instability in the area, also threatening Israel’s sense of security.

## **What is the promise? ...As Israel found success, so can Palestine**

Before Israel became a State, Jewish people were the victims of tremendous worldwide persecution and discrimination. Many immigrated to Palestine and located mainly in small clusters in the north. They soon created factories, schools, farms, and businesses. *Long before they were a state, they built the infrastructure of a state.* They were ready for statehood success in 1947, and therefore could successfully beat back consecutive attacks from Arab countries for decades.

Today, Israel has a booming economy with a very high standard of living with a fair and lively parliamentary democratic system. They are by far the most successful state in the Middle East in every category, economic, political, and social.

Today, Palestinians are clustered in areas of the West Bank similar to the clusters of Jews in pre-statehood Israel. Palestinians have the sympathies of most world leaders around the world and have received billions of dollars in aid over the years from around the world, yet not enough has gone to schools, roads, factories, and businesses.

*If they were to build the infrastructure of a state before they have a state, they could achieve the same prosperity and success as Israel, which would love to have a successful and vibrant business community right next door with which to trade.*

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